Holy Family Catholic Primary School

Handwriting Policy

APPROVED BY: SENIOR LEADERSHIP

DATE APPROVED: September 2026

DATE OF NEXT REVIEW: September 2027

Purpose: When communicating ideas in writing, it is important that children use a handwriting style which is neat and legible. The importance of handwriting should not be under-estimated. It is vital that children can write quickly, comfortably and legibly as it is a skill needed in many curriculum areas. Children's self-esteem is also heightened when they are able to take pride in their handwriting.

Aims:

- To develop a joined, confident handwriting style that is clear, legible, fluent and consistent throughout EYFS and Key Stages 1 and 2.
- To instil a positive attitude towards handwriting.
- To present work in a neat and orderly fashion appropriate to the task.

Provision

Children, from Reception through to Year 6, use the 'Nelson' handwriting scheme. Pupils are expected to be taught daily distinct handwriting lessons in Reception and KS1 for 15 minutes a day. In KS2, pupils are expected to be taught distinct handwriting lessons 4 times a week for 15 minutes. Reception pupils are taught 'lead-out' letter joins from the outset. Standard posters throughout the school display expectations in terms of letter joins. Children who display specific difficulties with handwriting will have these addressed through such interventions as slanted writing boards, rubber pencil grips, using alternative writing media etc. Children who show particularly pleasing progress with their joined handwriting are rewarded with 'Pen Licences' in Year 3.

Progression and Assessment

Progression: Letter joins become more complex, and as children progress through the school, they are encouraged to take creative risks with their own handwriting style, including elements of calligraphy, sign writing, note-taking etc.

Assessment: Children's handwriting is formatively assessed regularly. A joined handwriting style is essential for children to be judged as 'at expected standard' from Year 3 upwards.

Monitoring evaluation and improvement: children's handwriting is monitored on a daily basis by the class teacher, who is expected to provide intervention groups for children who need it. These children may be struggling with letter formation, joins or legibility. The teacher will make provision for the skills learned in these intervention groups to be applied and developed in day-to-day classwork. Regular taught handwriting lessons will also have a positive impact on children's letter formation, joins and writing speed.

Handwriting and Presentation Policy

Provision

Handwriting and expected standards of presentation should be taught as a whole class activity. Some additional lessons at the beginning of a term may be necessary. Intensive teaching is recommended at the start of each school year to clarify expectations, with further reinforcement in daily lessons (EYFS and KS1) and weekly lessons (KS2).

Teaching Time

Handwriting is taught daily in EYFS, Year 1 and Year 2.

In Year 3 and upwards, pupils are expected to be taught four distinct handwriting lessons a week for 15 minutes. The lesson structure should be:

- Brief warm-up exercises led by teacher. Children to check the three 'P's (paper, pen grip, posture). See Appendix 1 for warm-up ideas.
- Children to write the date and learning objective which is modelled by the teacher.
- Teacher models letter formation of letters in isolation, joins or words.
- Silent, independent work. Teacher circulates and intervenes to secure understanding and progress using our live marking system.

The teacher should act as a model when writing on the board or marking work, using a fluent joined style where appropriate.

Children record on lined paper in their handwriting books so they are able to apply taught skills across the curriculum.

A model of the agreed handwriting style (Nelson) should be displayed in all classrooms.

EYFS and KS1 use printed Learning Objectives and dates for their books. Children in Year 3 upwards are expected to hand write the date and Learning Objective in handwriting lessons for practice.

Handwriting in the Early Years

At Holy Family, we assess pupil's readiness to write in Foundation Stage 1 and on entry for any new pupils in FS2. This forms the next steps in planning for pupils and areas of provision.

Teaching handwriting - steps to consider

Can the child sit up in their chair?
Do they have sufficient shoulder stability?
Can they hold a pencil? Have they had experiences with colouring and drawing?
Can they recognise their letters?

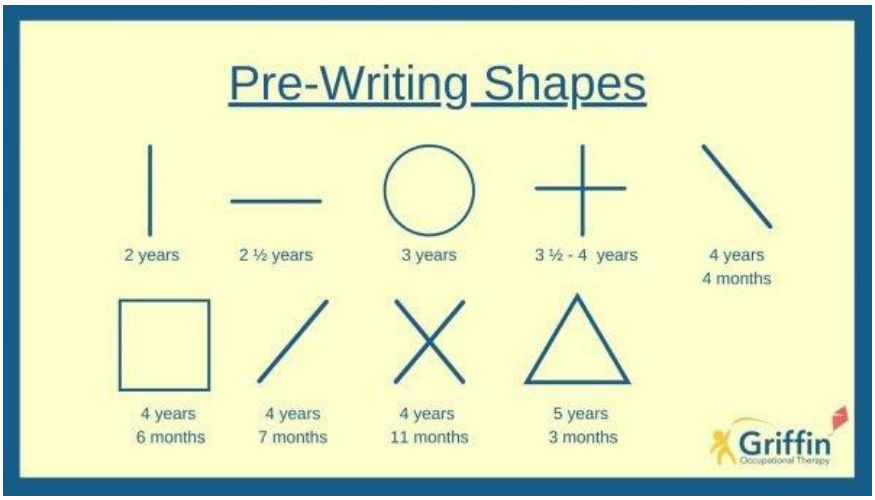
Provision in the EYFS supports the foundations for the skills required to read and write. In our areas of provision, wide ranging resources develop fine and gross motor skills for mark making to writing, developing the skills required to become good writers.

Pencil control is an essential part of writing letters and so therefore, this skill is taught in the EYFS. More information on pencil grasp development can be found here– **What does a good pencil grasp look like?**

Pre-writing skills

Prior to writing, children need to be able to make their pre-writing shapes. **Pre-writing shapes are all of the shapes that form letters**. They include the directional movements a child needs to make, like diagonal lines and curves. It is also important to focus on squares and triangles as the ability to create corners is an important developmental step.

These are the pre-writing shapes in order of difficulty: | – o + / square \ x triangle.



In the Early Years, we provide many opportunities indoors and out to develop fine and gross motor skills for children to practise these combinations of shapes according to their age and stage.

Provision for scissor skills at Stage 1 and 2 to be mastered is an expectation in FS1.

Letter formation in Foundation Stage 2

Letter formation groups

Teaching handwriting in letter formation groups is key to progress from these early shapes. As said above, writing is a motor skill, which needs to be practiced. When coaches teach motor skills, for example tennis or swimming, similar movements are practiced together. The **easier movements are taught first** and then they are built on.

At Holy Family, we teach letters in formation groups NOT in phonics groups.

The sequence of handwriting letters taught in FS2

Here's the groups of letter we teach, practise, rehearse, apply…

1. s a t p
2. i m n d

3. g o c k
4. ck e u r
5. h b f l ll ss
6. j v w x
7. y z q

In order to ensure children 'master' the formation of letters, handwriting is not taught as a one off activity. For example, one line of each letter is not committed to memory. Children are observed in forming their letters and not left alone.

Children should not be writing in the air; they should be seated at a table. At our school, we know the importance of correctly formed letters and the transition to paper and pencil as quickly as possible.

Handwriting in Year One

- **All of the above (FS2) plus:**
- Children by this point should all be forming letters accurately. Any pupil who is not will be supported through early interventions on entry into Year 1.
- In Year 1, the pencil grasp is correct and children are confident in using scissors at Stage 2 and Stage 3 level (see Appendix 2)
- By the end of Year One, children are using pre cursive letters in readiness for joining

Handwriting in Year Two

- During the Autumn Term, children have mastered pre cursive writing
- Letters are committed to memory through constant practice- not just a few lines
- All letters are formed accurately and timely interventions support pupils new into Year 2 or those who need additional support
- Cursive writing is taught in the Spring Term.
- By the end of Y2, pupils are using cursive confidently and Stage 3 & 4 scissor level

The Nelson Handwriting Scheme

At Holy Family Catholic Primary School, we use the Nelson Handwriting Scheme to help children develop their handwriting. Children must be taught individual letters first so that they see them as individual units before learning to join. Letter formation as per the scheme is as follows.

Lower case letters

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Capital letters

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Numbers

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Letter sets

The Nelson Handwriting Scheme groups letters into five overlapping 'sets', as follows.

Set 1	a c d e h i k l m n s t u	Twelve letters with exit flicks, plus 's'.
Set 2	a c d e g i j m n o p q r s u v w x y	Nineteen letters which start at the top of the x-height.
Set 3	b f h k l t	Six letters which start at the top of the ascender.
Set 4	f o r v w	Five letters which finish at the top of the x-height.
Set 5	b g j p q x y z	Eight letters after which no join is ever made. Joins are not made to or from the letter 'z'. Note that f, g, j and y do NOT have loops.

Letter joins

Basic join	Set 1 → Set 2	to letters without ascenders	**in ma ka**
Second join	Set 1 → Set 3	to letters with ascenders	**ab if**
Third join	Set 4 → Set 2	horizontal joins	**oa fo we**
Fourth join	Set 4 → Set 3	Horizontal joins to letters with ascenders	**ob fl wh**

<u>Physical Environment</u>

The Three 'P's:

- paper
- pen grip
- posture

Attention to posture and seating arrangements is important. To this end, all teachers need to ensure the following are in place:

- Paper or books should be slanted at 11 o'clock for right-handed children or 1 o'clock for left-handed children.
- Chair and table should be at a comfortable height (height of the chair should be such that the thighs are horizontal and feet flat on the floor).
- Table should support the forearm so that it rests lightly on the surface and is parallel to the floor.
- Children should be encouraged to sit up straight and not slouch.
- Tables should be free of clutter.
- Rooms should be well lit.
- Left-handed pupils should sit on the left of their partners.

Children who display specific difficulties with handwriting will have these addressed through such interventions as slanted writing boards, rubber pencil grips, using alternative writing media etc.

Pencil Grip

A comfortable pencil grip is taught in Reception and consistently applied throughout the school. This generally consists of thumb and forefinger gripping the pencil with the middle finger supporting it. Other writing grips may be applied for children who may struggle with this grip. Writing grip triangles may be attached to the pencil if children find this comfortable and an aid to their natural pencil grip. The focus is for a comfortable recognised grip which maintains legible handwriting. Left-handed children are encouraged to position their fingers about 1.5 centimetres from the end of the writing implement to avoid smudging their work.

Presentation

It is very important to ensure consistency towards presentation of work across the school. Staff should focus on the following guidelines to ensure this consistency, taking into account age and ability of children where necessary.

Aim: to ensure a consistent high standard of presentation across the school in exercise books, in order to raise children's self-esteem and pride in their work.

Writing equipment

Children will write in pencil until they demonstrate sufficient ability to write fluently and legibly, at which point they may use a handwriting pen as supplied by the school. When a child's class teacher feels they are ready to gain a pen licence, they will take their work to the Assistant Head teacher (Miss Wainwright) for it to be assessed and a pen licence will be awarded if they are ready or next steps if certain joins need to be accurate before moving on to pen.

Children should write in black ink, ideally with a Manuscript or Berol Handwriting Pen. Gel pens, fineliners and biros are not permitted.

Diagrams and pictures

Pencils should be used in all subjects to draw pictures and diagrams, along with rulers if necessary. Gel pens, fineliners and felt tips are not permitted in exercise books, as these can smudge or bleed through paper. Coloured pencils should be used instead.

Appendix 1 - Pencil Grasp

What can I do to help a child who has an immature pencil grasp?

Firstly, you need to consider if a child has adequate fine motor skills. For younger children or children with developmental delays it is important to consider if they are ready to hold a pencil. The child also needs to be demonstrating an interest in mark making. They do not need to be Picasso, but they do need to be interested in holding a marker and watching the marks it makes. If the child is not at this stage, then you may want to start with:

- Mark making with finger paints
- Mark making with fingers in sand
- Using a paint brush to paint water onto windows and fences outside
- Level one or two of our fine motor skill development programme could be a better starting point for these children.
  For children under five years of age we strongly recommend using finger crayons and small pencils to help them develop the hand control and strength required to develop a tripod grasp. We would highly recommend these if the child is still using a gross grasp, digital pronate grasp, or they are spreading all of their fingers along the pencil. You can make small pencils by sawing regular thick pencils into 3-4cm lengths or you can use small pieces of crayon. The video below discusses why you might consider these alternatives. We discuss other pencil grips in our article **To pencil grip, or not to pencil grip?**

Essentials 1 – Gross motor skills

Motor skills for handwriting – Postural control and shoulder stability

Before a child can hold their pencil effectively, they need to be able to sit up. Sitting requires adequate postural control. Postural control is our ability to keep our bodies stable when we are stationary and when we move. It is essential for us to be able to use our arms, hands and fingers with good control.

Imagine a building. In order for it to stand up, there needs to be strong foundations underneath. Without strong foundations a building would fall over. Our foundation is postural control. Postural control starts developing from the moment a child is born. Initially, babies have no postural control. Their heads even need support. Over time a baby can hold their head up and then push up on their arms and roll over. Tummy time helps to develop these skills and helps with shoulder stability.

Our shoulders are the next layer of the foundation. They are like the concrete floor on a building. Our shoulders support our arms and hands; in the same way the floor supports the walls. When there is reduced shoulder stability, a child will have less control over their arms and hand.

Help a child to develop their postural control and shoulder stability

1. Get off the devices and out into the playground!
2. Climbing is a great way to help to improve shoulder stability.
3. Swings and slides help with postural control.

4. Walking, or running, up and down unstable surfaces also helps with postural control and endurance.
5. Crawling is also a great way to help with shoulder stability. Tunnels can be fun but if you don't have these, sleeping bags and duvet covers make good substitutes. Chairs and tables can also be used to make obstacle courses.
6. For older children, cycling and gymnastics or martial arts are great. Martial arts and gymnastics have the added bonus of including movements using the left and right sides and both sides together.

Help a child to develop their finger and hand control

1. Messy play is a great way to help with hand awareness. Sand, shave foam and finger paint are a good starting point. Mud kitchen can be loads of fun. Cooking can also be fun. Making pizzas or cutting out pastry or biscuits are great ways to develop finger and hand control.
2. Playdough and Dough Disco are also an excellent choice.
3. Finger songs are also a great way to improve the fine motor skills of younger children. There are a number of animated songs on YouTube, this playlist has a good selection.
4. The song 'Crocodile Snap,' is also written to help children to find their 'crocodile fingers,' or the fingers they need to use on their pencil.
5. Construction toys, are great activities to help with finger and hand control.
6. Musical instruments are brilliant as they help with hand control and timing and sequencing.
7. Scissors and craft are also great choices.
8. Many pretend play toys, e.g. doctor sets, dolls houses, trucks and cars, also encourage fine motor skills.

Sometimes children with fine motor skill delays will avoid these activities. This means they are not developing the required fine motor skills for handwriting success. It can be helpful to prompt these children to engage with them, to ensure they are getting the experiences, especially in FS1.

Appendix 2 - Scissor skills

At Holy Family, we allow children to use scissors as soon as they start school, we observe how they are handled and support children in how to correctly hold and use them. We differentiate the level of provision according to the skill they show.

We explain to children that scissors are used whilst sitting, we do not allow children to misuse scissors: e.g. throwing, walking around with them, and pointing them at others. Children learn how to handle scissors safely in the EYFS.

Pre-scissor skills: This stage is for children who are not yet using or interested in using scissors or pencils and need a bit more practice with general fine motor skills. The activities are designed to help with the hand and finger strength and coordination needed to use scissors. These activities can be used alongside stage one to help with preparedness for cutting.

Stage 1 – Learning to snip

This stage is designed for children who are not able to cut with scissors at all. These children might use two hands on the scissors and will likely need an adult to hold the paper. The activities are designed to support correct hand position on scissors, holding the paper and snipping. This stage can be used alongside the pre-scissor skills.

Stage 2 – Learning to cut lines and shapes

This stage is designed for children who have mastered basic snipping skills, but need to learn to cut on lines and to cut out shapes. The activities start with straight lines but progress towards cutting out a circle. If children are not yet snipping with scissors, they should start at Stage 1.

Stage 3 – Getting creative

This stage is for children who have mastered basic lines and shapes, but are ready for more complex shapes and some creativity. The line thickness decreases and the variety of shapes increase. There are many cut and paste activities as well as basic origami folding activities.

Stage 4 – More complex cuts

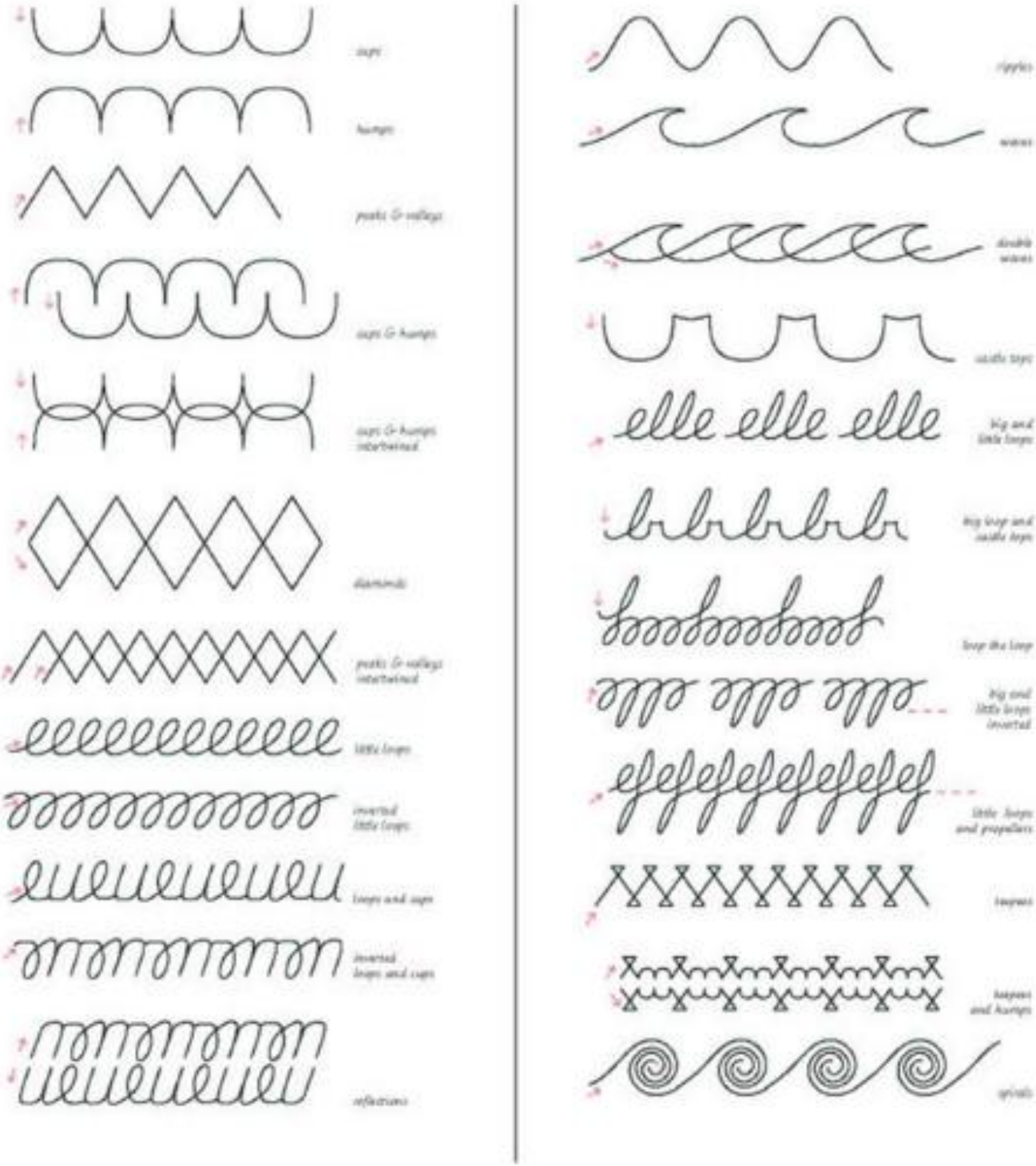
This stage is designed to further challenge children's cutting skills. Zig zags and star shapes are included here as they are actually much more complex than they first appear. To take skills even further, there are activities which require the children to cut inside shapes as well.

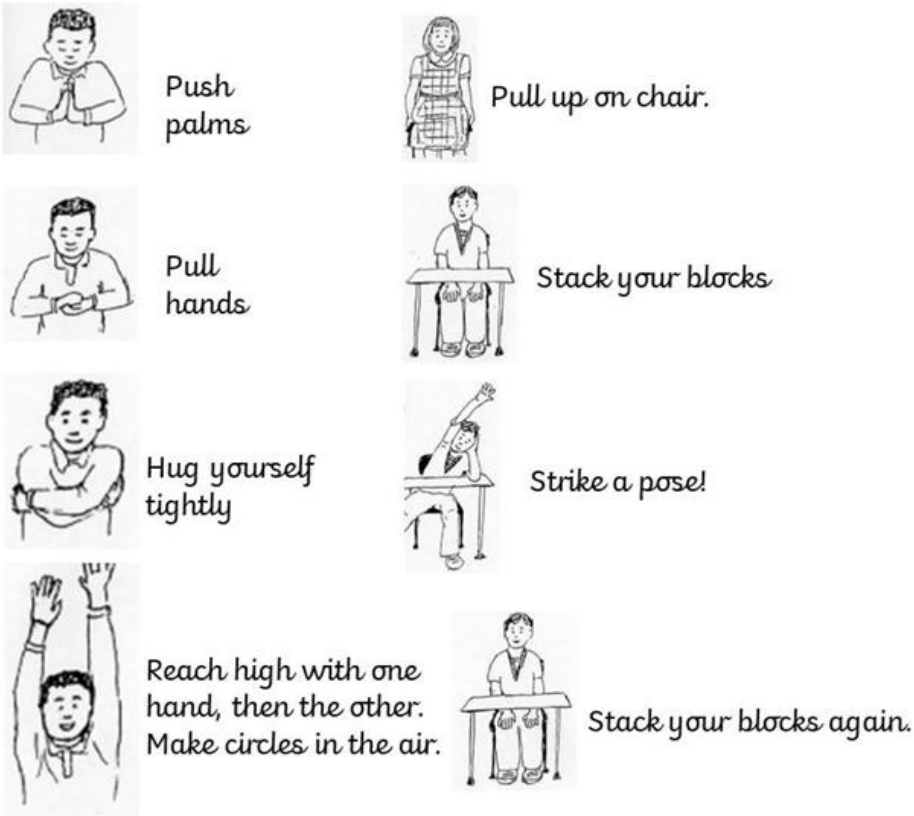
Appendix 3 - Handwriting warm-up ideas

I Don't Know! Shrug shoulders up, down, forwards and backwards, as if you were saying 'I don't know!'	**Crocodile Jaws** Raise your arms in the air with one above the other. Then snap your hands together like a crocodile snapping its jaw. Take turns having the left and right arm above each other for this activity.	**Air Traffic Controller** Start with your elbows bent and your hands in a fist in front of each shoulder. Then straighten your elbows, moving one arm out from the body and the other arm to the side of your body. Alternate arms back and forth.
Butterfly Begin with your arms straightened in front of your body. Link your thumbs together to make an "X" and turn your hands facing out. Using the shoulders to move, make small circles with the hands, moving from left to right (remember to do this movement from the shoulders, not the fingers or hand).	**SHOULDER, HAND AND FINGER WARMUPS FOR HANDWRITING** 	**Finger Push-Ups** Place the tips of your fingers together and straighten the fingers while pushing the finger tips against each other.
Piano Drum your fingers on the table or desk as if playing the piano. Make sure each finger touches the desk. You can also work on fast vs. slow movements with this. "How slowly can you play the piano?" "How fast can you play the piano?" "Can you use both hands together to play the piano?" (works on bilateral coordination skills).	**Baton Twirling** Get your pencils out and start to twirl them in the air like a baton, spinning them both horizontally and vertically in the air. This combines some shoulder and finger exercises together.	**Imaginary Gloves** Pull on your "gloves" by applying firm pressure to the fingers and back of each hand. This provides proprioceptive and tactile feedback and prepares the muscles for movement.

(Further resources are available on the Oxford Owl Nelson Handwriting portal)

Handwriting exercises





BLOCKS
heads
shoulders
hips
knees
feet

Appendix 4

Glossary of handwriting terms

baseline: the line on which most letters rest.

x-height: also called the midpoint, it is the height of all letters that are not **ascenders** or **descenders**. Letters that do not go above the x-height are: a c e m n o r s u v w x z

ascender: a letter that goes above the **x-height**. Letters that go above the x-height are: b d f h k l t and all CAPITAL LETTERS.

ascender line: the line that ascenders go up to. If there were a line across the top of b d f h k l, that would be the ascender line.

descender: a letter that goes below the **baseline**. Letters that go below the baseline are: f g j p q y. The part that goes below the baseline is called the **tail**.

descender line: the line that descenders go down to. If there were a line across the bottom of f g j p q y, that would be the descender line.

upstroke: any movement upward with the writing instrument.

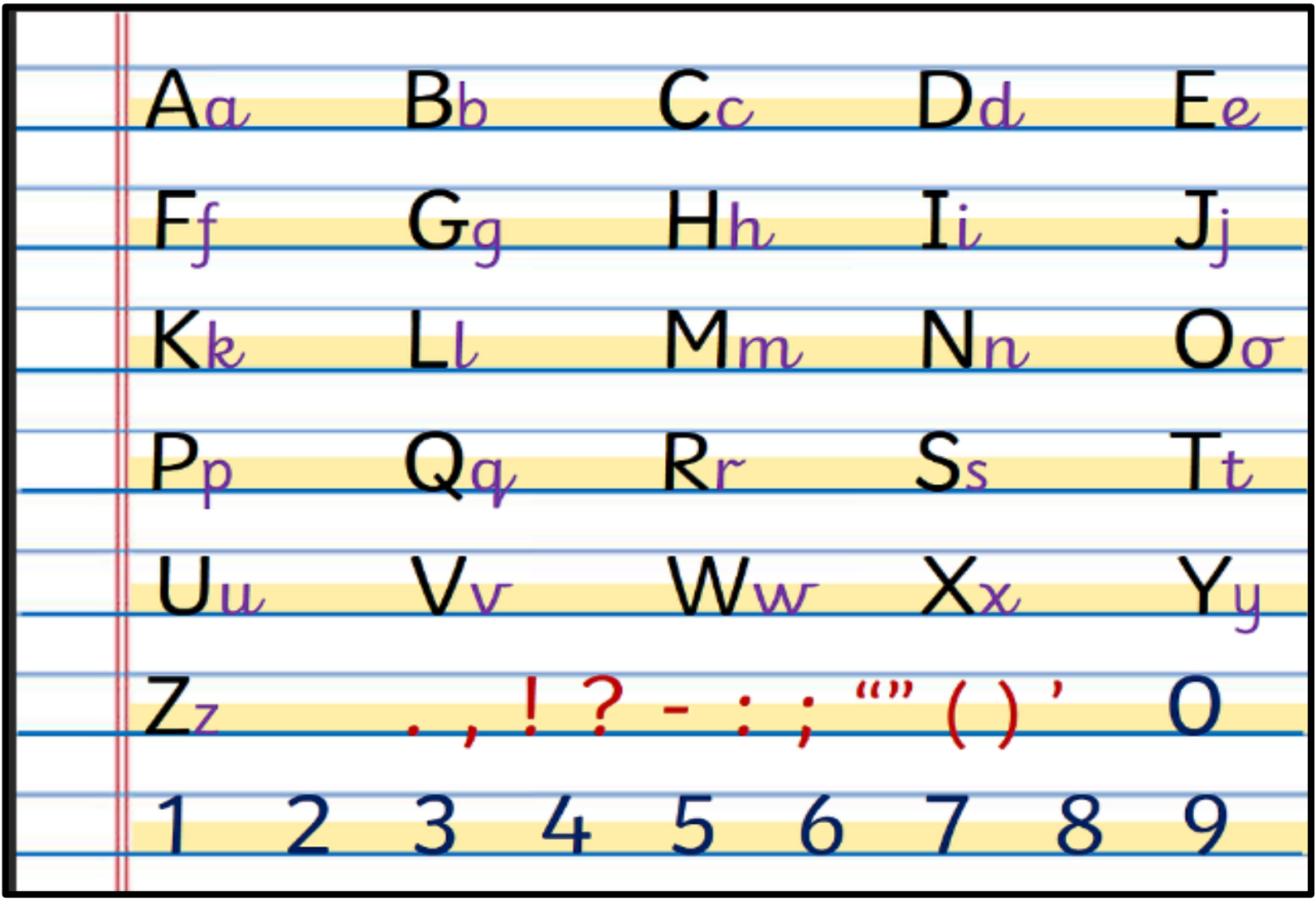
downstroke: any movement downward with the writing instrument.

stem: the vertical line in a letter: B b D d F f g H h I i J j K k L l M m N n P p R r T t u Y

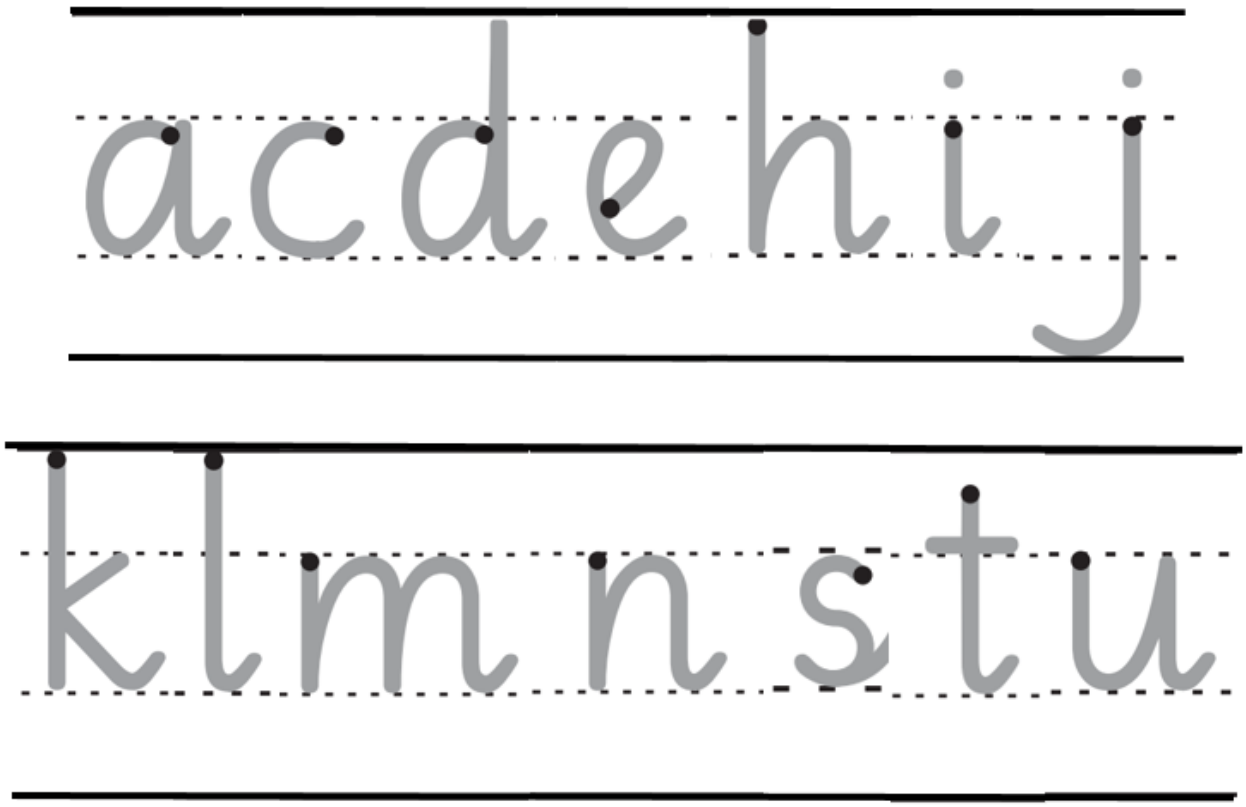
crossbar: the horizontal line through these letters: A E F f G H T t

counter: the white space inside a closed letter like these: A a B b D d e g O o P p Q q
flourish: an ornamental stroke, also called a swash.
hook: a tiny flourish, usually on the end of a letter.
slant: to left or right in comparison to vertical angle, also called **gradient.**
weight: the thickness of the lines

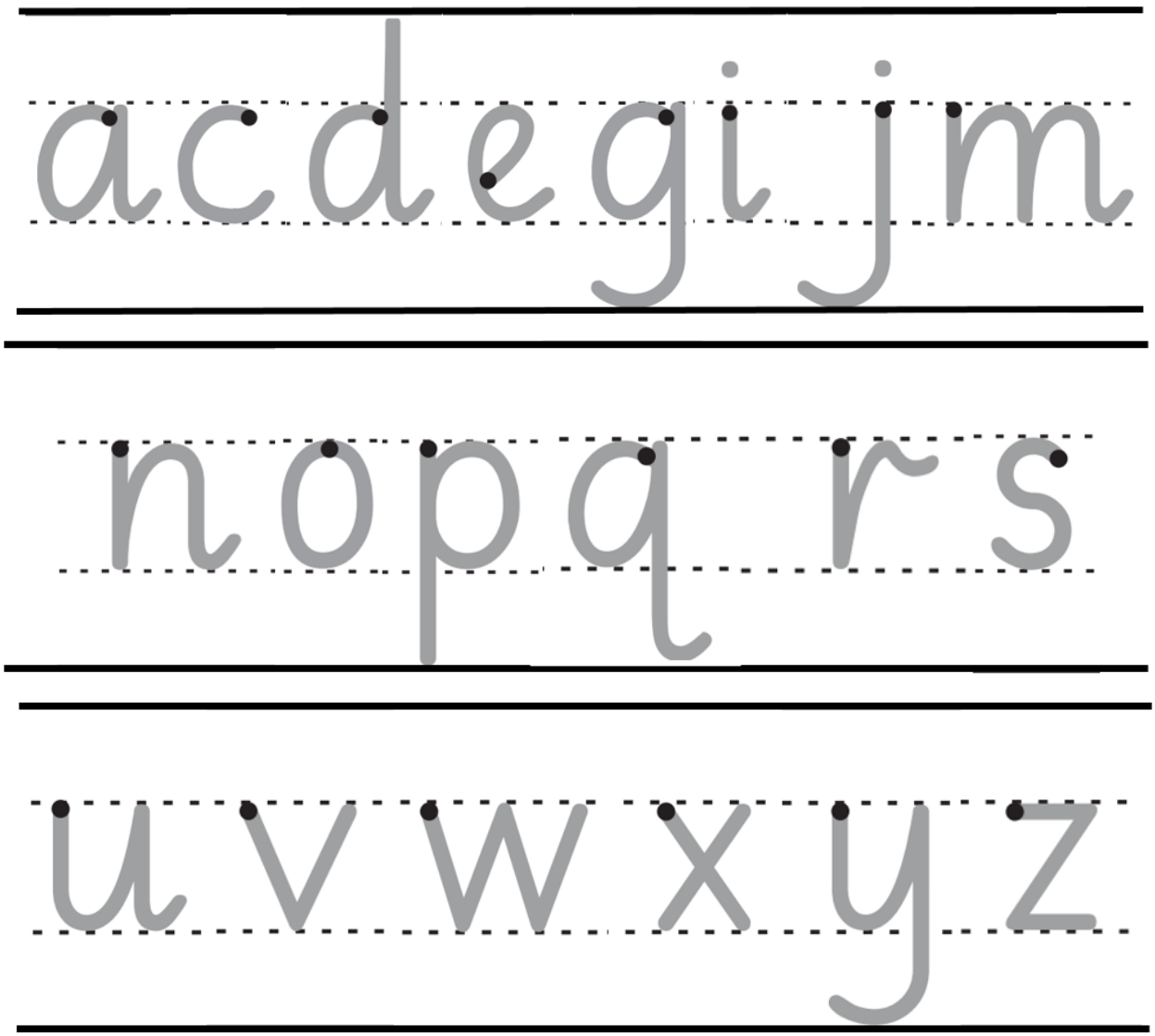
Handwriting



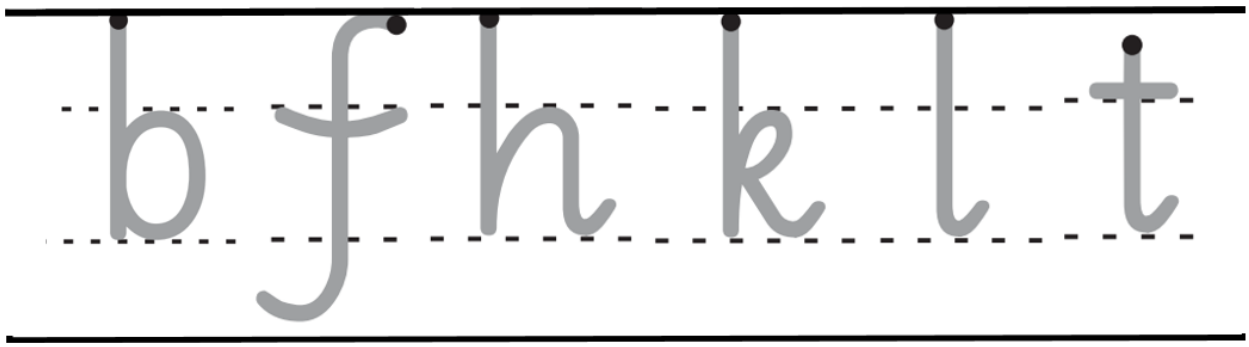
Set 1: These letters have exit flicks:



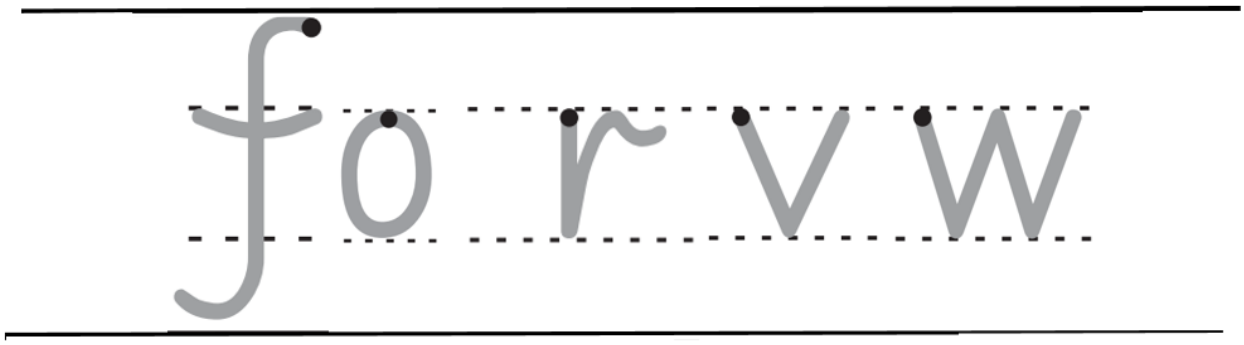
Set 2: These letters start from the ‘x’ height.



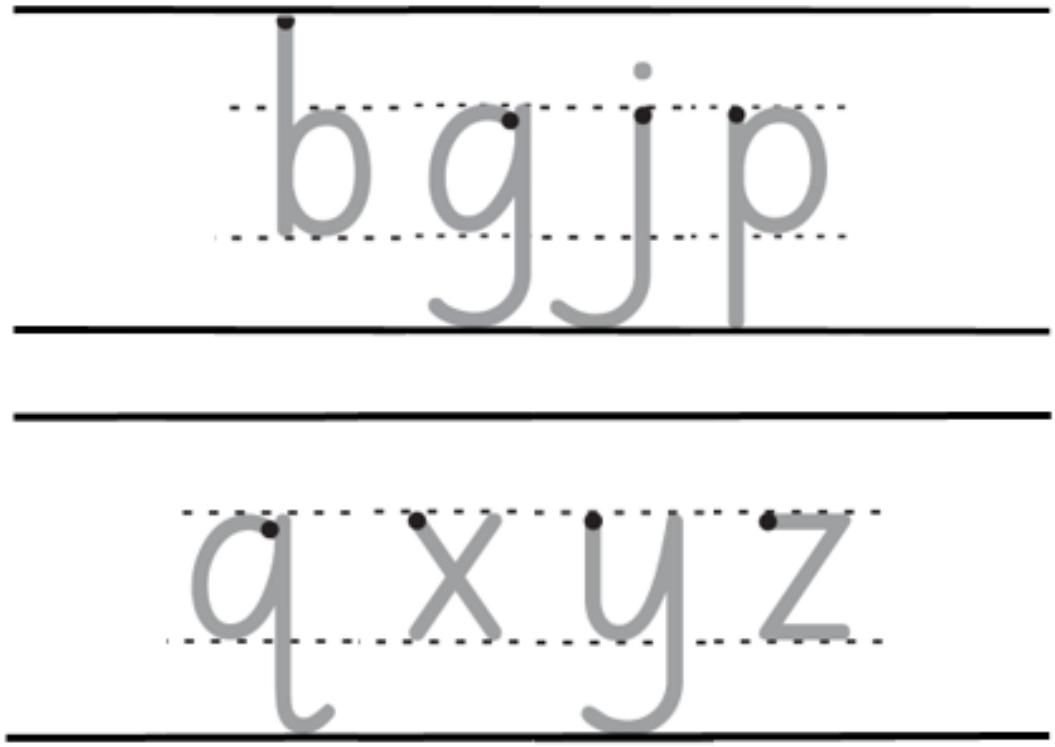
Set 3: These letters start from the ascender.



Set 4: These letters finish at the top of the ‘x’ height.



Set 5: These letters do NOT join onto other letters.



Remember: we don’t loop the f g j y!

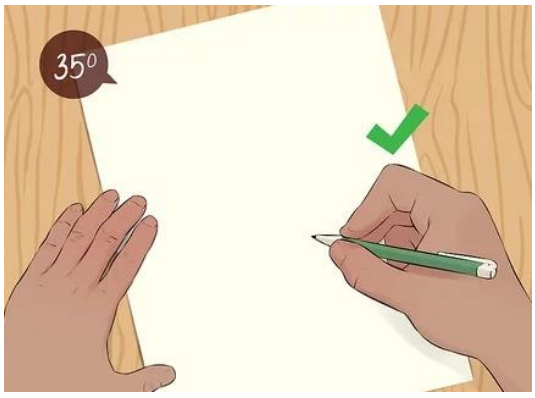
Check your 3 Ps!

Pen grip

Are you gripping your pen correctly?

Paper position

Is your paper at 11 o'clock or 1 o'clock?



Posture

Straight back, feet on the floor and use your other hand to keep your paper in position.